

ORPHANED COMPUTERS & GAME SYSTEMS

Volume II, Issue 7 December 1998

Video games are social as well as private events. Playing against a friend is always fun, but that experience can be taken to a new level if the proper procedures are taken. Follow these time-tested steps and you too can gain extra enjoyment out of your favorite games.

First, it is important to build hype about how great a player you are. Make sure the other player realizes that this is *meant*, not as a friendly jest but as an act of war. You are not trying to be funny here, so don't smile. Make your "take no prisoners" approach to gaming well-known.

Second, it is very important to embarrass the other player at every opportunity -- even if no one else around knows what you are talking about. For example, over Christmas dinner it would be especially appropriate to say something like "Pass the gravy, you loser of unicorns." Of course, you know you are referring to *Archon*, and your buddy knows you are referring to *Archon*, but everyone else thinks you just fell off a truck.

Third, make sure that when you finally do start playing, you have a backup excuse in case you lose. The old standby that the joystick is broken doesn't fly these days, so you will have to come up with something else. Try some of these great excuses before a game begins: "My hands have been getting really sweaty lately." "This joystick is not one that I'm used to." "I've been thinking of letting you win" (this is especially good, because it just

might be true).

Fourth, if during game-play you begin to lose, it is now important to follow up on the excuses that were previously laid out. "Man, this joystick is making my hands so sweaty, I can't even control the game!" "This joystick is terrible -- if I had *mine*, the game would already be over!" "Feels pretty good to win, doesn't it? Too bad I'm letting you!" "That's not realistic! You couldn't really kill me that way!"

If you win, it is of absolute importance that the other player knows. I mean, sure, they know you have won -- but do they know they lost? Let them know! "I've never seen anyone play that bad before. I could give lessons if you want." "Do you want to play again after you get over your loss?"

From the moment my fingers wrap around a joystick to play a game of *Archon* against my arch-nemesis, Chris, I know I'm in for a game of quick reflexes and even faster excuse-making. He is my only equal at either of these pastimes. I'm not sure what is more fun -- playing the game (win or lose) or trying to top the last smart remark that was thrown at me. -- AT

This is the tenth issue of *OC&GS* published (Volume I consisted of three issues, which Adam did by himself). In celebration of this anniversary, I've decided to bash Adam's talent at playing games. For

instance, let's take *Archon*.

And how timely! We just played a game. Sure, he happened to win. But Adam plays dirty, and there are specific reasons why he beat me.

For one thing, the joystick I was using got really sweaty. It had obviously been coated with some sort of warming substance to make my hands sweat. It was so slippery, I couldn't even control the game!

I should have known, though; it was Adam's joystick. If I'd had *mine*, the game would have been over much more quickly and you can guess who the winner would have been.

The game also contains several instances in which the realism falters. There were a lot of times he couldn't have really killed me the way he did, had it been real life. I know that video games require a suspension of belief, but come *on*. Unicorns became extinct *centuries* ago.

But I'm sure it felt pretty good to win. Too bad I let him.

Anyway, enjoy the tenth issue of this ever-more-hefty hunk of hearsay, and especially dig the exciting stuff Adam's gonna lay on you, like an overview of some new Atari 8-bit carts (!) and a review of a new and actually fun Odyssey 2 game (!!). We're also proud to present the *worst* 2600 games ever made! And if that's not enough, there's an article about Atari's adventure games for their 2600 and the usual provocative, wordy stuff about the state of gaming today. Rock and roll! -- CF

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This issue of *OC&GS* may be downloaded, in PDF of text format, from:

<http://w3.tvi.cc.nm.us/~atrionfo>

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If you would like to exchange your 'zine or newsletter, send it! We'll send the next *OC&GS*!

If you received this issue free, think about sending a buck for the next one. Suggestions are always welcome. What subjects would you like covered?

If you want to contribute, send us some stuff or e-mail text files to us. We love having other writers.

Classic Gaming Gifts (and where to get them)

By Adam Trionfo

There are many places to buy classic items today, especially from individuals on the Internet. But it seems that almost everyone deals with the same kind of items -- often, one place is indistinguishable from another. So, this being the December issue, listed here are some of the companies or people that have unique or unusual items.

Santa may be bringing you some terrific gifts this year, but even if you don't celebrate the holidays, there is always a reason to buy cool classic computer-related items. Pat yourself on the back and send away your cash for some terrific gifts for yourself! Treat yourself to a neat, and perhaps pricy, hardware upgrade (a hard drive for your C64) or budget for new software for a dusty system (*Amok!* for the Odyssey 2). There can be no excuse for a lack of ideas this year. Short on cash? Share this list with your favorite gift-giver -- you never know what you might get.

There are so many classic dealers (especially if you count individuals on the Net), it is impossible to make this list comprehensive. Because of space, I have left out many folks who I know are excellent dealers. I have tried to include people and places that have some unusual items. It may be time to create another dealer list. The last one, from the first issue, is four years old.

One last note: Without Internet access, it is difficult to reach some of these people. If you don't have access to the Internet, remember that many local libraries and community colleges offer free access to the community. For classic computer users, the Internet has become an invaluable resource.

Adam's House -- This is the only place that I know of that specifically features ColecoVision and Adam hardware and software. The list and descriptions of items are unmatched. Take a glance at the online catalog. Buy an Adam and then add a serial and parallel port, disk drive and hard drive, and you are ready for some real fun! (Adam's House, 1829 County Road #130, Pearland, TX

77581-9503. Phone - (281)482-5040/(281)997-6907)

B & C ComputerVisions -- I recently bought a number of items from these great folks at World of Atari '98. They have an excellent presence online and are very helpful. (B & C ComputerVisions, 5917 Stope Way, El Dorado, Ca. 95623-4716. Phone - (530) 295-9270. FAX - (530) 295-9271. E-mail - myatari2@juno.com. Web: www.myatari.com)

Best Electronics -- If you don't buy an item, then you have to at least purchase the 228-page revision 10 catalog. It is amazing! It has just about everything ever made for the Atari 8-bit and ST series, plus great pictures of unreleased items, tips and information. It is the coolest way to spend ten bucks I can think of. The catalog itself might be the present you have been looking forward to all year! (Best Electronics, 2021 The Alameda Suite 290, San Jose, California 95126. Phone - (408)243-6950)

JerryG -- This is one of the most comprehensive websites around. Jerry has many items available for just about every classic system made. There is a fantastic online museum, too. Look at the the want list he has if you have unusual items for trade. (<http://atari2600.com>)

John Dondzila's Home Page -- Check out new games for the Vectrex, ColecoVision and Odyssey 2 here. John has made some very amazing products and is considered by many to have made the best-ever Vectrex game, *Patriots*. (<http://www.monmouth.com/~pcjohn/>)

Video 61 -- You would be hard-pressed to find anyone as nice as Lance at Video 61. He doesn't just deal with Atari computers and game systems for nostalgic reasons; he loves them and uses them currently. Order one of the new cartridges reviewed in this issue! (Video 61 & Atari Sales, 22735 Congo St. N.E., Stacy, MN 55079. Phone - (651)462-2500)

Video Magic -- This is a newsletter and catalog. It is a great effort at preserving classic video games as well as a place to find fair prices on current used titles. *Video Magic* is one of the few places I have found to get classic computer magazines. (Video Magic, c/o Frank M. Polosky, P.O. Box 9542, PGH PA 15223) -- AT

Presenting
**The Worst 2600
Games Ever Made**

-- or --

"Rare" Doesn't
Necessarily Mean "Good"
by Chris Federico

Some Atari 2600 cartridges are much harder to find than others. In most cases, there's a good reason for this: Nobody bought them back in the day because they stank. With the exception of the famously disdainful *Pac-Man* adaptation, games that are very common, ones that you see in every thrift shop and at every flea market, are very enjoyable to most gamers -- or were when they came out, anyway. In all but exceptional cases, such as games that suffered lack of due promotion, titles are sparse today that didn't sell well in the '80s because they were no fun.

Therefore, if you only collect games because you like to play them and care little about amassing a collection just for the sake of quantity, you need not envy those who own "rare" titles; majoratively speaking, you're not missing much.

I don't own any prototypes or any of the rare-rare-super-rare carts that command ludicrous amounts of cash, like *Chase the Chuckwagon* or *Cubicolor*, but my argument obviously exists outside that scope. Strictly in terms of game-play, many of the most insipid video games ever released to the unfortunate public are, logically, now less common than things like *Asteroids* or *Missile Command*. This overview of the worst 2600 programs (or the worst in *my* opinion, but hardly arguable as such, as you'll see) is mostly made up of that less-than-common Fools' Gold, but you'll see some prevalent

titles here too. I'm not going to pick on certain late-'70s games that Atari made (*Street Racer*, *Star Ship*, *Bowling*, *Sky Diver*, *Human Cannonball*, etc.) because they were programming ventures undertaken when the industry's pioneers knew little about their own machine, and they were among the first of their kind and probably did entertain the earliest gaming enthusiasts with the very novelty of their nature. Now, without further ado (bad drum roll): the worst of the worst!

COCONUTS (1982, Telesys)
This is a very emotionally moving video game. It's so dramatic that it may drive you to tears if you read on.

All you have to do is picture some happy kids at the department store asking their happy father to shell out thirty-odd dollars for the neat-looking game with the monkey illustration on the box. Then picture the happy family taking it home, sticking it into the VCS in the den and turning on the power. Picture the dazed look in the father's eyes as he thinks about what else he could have spent that thirty beans on. Picture the confused, hurt looks on the kids' faces as they realize that Atari does not always equal God of Fun. Picture the mom patting the kids on the head. We now have a distinctly non-happy family. Then a little argument starts, and someone pulls out a gun...

Coconuts looks very pretty for a 1982 game. Our hero Stanley prances around in excellent (for the period) cartoony detail (although with jerky animation) under his hardhat and umbrella; Coco the Monkey pops from position to position in the well-drawn trees above, hurling coconuts straight down at Stanley, who has to dodge them (sorta like an anti-

Kaboom!). If his umbrella is hit, he has only his hardhat for protection; when that's taken out, his bare head can take one more hit before the four-note "uh-oh" tune is played once more and the game is over. Your score depends on how many coconuts you've dodged.

The graphics are okay, then; but nothing can make up for the terrible game-play. It's a very, very boring game. It seems like a rough draft or demo. These tiny coconuts are falling toward this huge guy, and they're so easy to dodge that you could be playing another game on another TV at the same time without getting hit. The coconuts are thrown in "waves," and you start a new one by pressing the fire button; but these so-called waves often exist of only one coconut apiece. I'm serious!

Adam once told me that this was actually level one of a multi-level game that another company was planning. Telesys decided to steal only this installment in Stanley's supposedly varying adventures. Not that it would have been any better if all of the vapor-levels were this innocuous.

This is one of the worst games on any platform, and it therefore deserves a special pedestal. Someone dreaming all his life of making a truly bad game couldn't hope to reach this level of badness. Quite an accomplishment.

PICNIC (1982, U.S. Games)
You wanna know why the industry underwent a shakeout in the mid-'80s? Just play *Picnic*.

Some jerky, aesthetically displeasing bugs are flying around two huge burgers sitting at the bottom of the screen. These do not look like burgers; their size and blockiness put *Surround* to shame. Also on the ground, between the burgers, is a big solid square. It's supposed to be

one of those bug-zapper things.

Using a paddle controller to move your flyswatter from side to side (it doesn't look like a flyswatter; it looks like one of the tiny sub-demons in *Demon Attack*), you're supposed to wait until one of these spasmodic bugs emits a vertical line at one of your burgers. This means he's sucking up part of it. As he's doing it, you hit the fire button to "swat" him (turn your flyswatting demon briefly upside-down). Timing is everything. In fact, it's the whole game. It's tedious, boring, and not viscerally pleasing in the least.

Swatting a bug sends him flying into a screen border, against which he bounces. This happens a few times (like Brutus when Popeye punches him in that game). If the bug lands in the zapper, you get bonus points or something.

Big, square chunks are sucked out of your big, square burgers until the picnic's over and you get to go home -- yayyyy!

Dull, repetitive and pointless-feeling, this game deserves many accolades for its palpable amount of all-encompassing badness. All you can do is shake your head sadly and pull out the cartridge. Let's hope that the next one you insert isn't...

AIRLOCK (1982, Data Age) Not only did this programmer succeed in concocting a thoroughly bad game, but he managed to add high amounts of unrewarding frustration.

Your little character's trapped inside a sinking submarine. The water level's rising along with your blood pressure (see above paragraph). You find yourself on the lowest of four floors; you have to run across each one before the time limit's up. If you don't make it to

the top in time, you get a cute picture of the submarine sinking with your guy inside. If you make it across a corridor to the elevator at the far end, grabbing two lines dangling from the ceiling along the way, you move up a floor and the old one fills with water.

To pick on something that should be superficial, our hero is a little stick-figure that runs in jerks with absolutely no animation. This shouldn't matter, but man, does it add admirably to the overall badness! There are two little squares in the floor of each corridor that you have to jump over as you run, and these are in the exact same place in every hallway. There's also a little bad guy traversing back and forth across each floor. The game-play consists of timing your jumps to get over the moving bad guys and the stationary squares, as well as leaping up to grab the two lines you need to complete each floor.

Here's where the real badness comes in: There are only certain points at which you can successfully jump to the left or right, and these are very scarce. The main reason is that your guy stays in the air a very long time and his jumps are very high and wide. If you had the tolerance, you could memorize every single jump in the game (all eight or so).

If one of these long, slow jumps plants you even partly on one of the squares on the floor, your leap stops with an abrupt farting sound (CLUE! See page 10). By the time you realize that you can't even *start* a jump near a square, a roving baddie catches you. Even though you don't care enough about the game to win, you're swearing at it. It's just designed very, very badly. If you'll recall the end of *OC&GS* Vol. II, Issue #2, this game gave Adam a nervous breakdown. That's quite an achievement for the aspiring bad-game programmer, don't you think?

Monotonous, unfulfilling *and* maddening, this game would cause the calmest nun in Italy to throw her VCS at the Pope.

SORCERER and **FIREFLY** (1983, Mythicon) These and other games were sold as special bargain-price titles (ten bucks apiece) by Mythicon, who might, if the games offer any evidence, be the only company in gaming history at which the founder, accountant, P.R. man and programmer were all the same guy.

These are the only two I've played, but they are, quite literally, the same program with different graphics plugged in, so I'm sure that the others were equally bad. It's more interesting to look at the illustration on each of the cartridge labels than to play the games themselves. There's no substance to even really attack. They almost don't even exist. That's quite a waste of ten dollars, don't you agree?

Your character is supposed to fly across each screen from left to right, exiting into further screens until you (quickly) get back to the first one. On each screen is a bad guy that you can either ignore (this is very, very easy) or shoot. Most bad guys render a treasure when shot. Grab the treasure for points! (Phewww...)

If you opt to ignore the bad guys, the object of this game becomes primarily to move from left to right over and over again. It's like a primitive screen-saver that you have to operate manually.

This is funny: When you die, your character assumes a horizontal dead-person guise and is overtaken by forced downward movement. In other words, you're supposed to fall to the bottom of the screen. But you can control yourself while you're falling, except that pushing up on

the joystick stops the plummet and hovers your carcass indefinitely. You can still move left or right while you're doing this, if you're good with diagonals.

So not only are these games badly conceived, but they're badly coded as a bonus. True winners! If you get really sick this winter and you drug yourself up so much that you can barely move, plug in a Mythicon game to get your coordinative fix until you're healthy again and you can move on to something much more engaging, such as *Canyon Bomber*.

FROGS AND FLIES (1982, M-Network) You sit there on a lily pad that looks like a graphics crash, competing with another frog by jumping across to the opposite pad and back, timing your jumps to tongue flies out of the air. That's it. No, really. That's IT.

In a previous issue I suggested using this cartridge as a doorstop, but I've rethought this. If you're like me, then some of your friends know about classic games, and if they were to come over and see what was holding your door open, they'd think that you had become a really boring person, or perhaps that you were going through a phase of depression. Instead, use it as a Roach Motel. Just coat its insides with honey, stick it far into the cabinet under the sink, and you're set!

CHUCK NORRIS: SUPER KICKS (1983, Xonox) Oh, my god. This half of one of Xonox's double-ended cartridges must be played to really sink in. It's beyond terrible. Words haven't been invented. It's surreal in its negativity.

First off, it's so poorly

structured that it's difficult to figure out what in the hell you're doing, even with the documentation handy; and by the time you do get some sort of grip on it, you don't want to play anymore. You'd rather beat your head against a spinning table-saw blade. It's SO bad.

You *are* Chuck Norris! (Ahem...) You're advancing your way up the left part of a forked road (there are probably more road patterns, but I've never played far enough). You have a time limit that decreases very quickly when you step on the grass median. I'm not sure why Chuck gets hurt by grass all of a sudden. I'll bet that he hated the game when it came out. It makes him look like *such* a wimp. After you walk a few steps, the game freezes and then changes to an empty screen. A little Chuck and a little bad guy are about to fight, so I guess the frozen game has meant that you've encountered someone.

You freeze in a badly-rendered karate pose when you press the button, and there you're stuck for a few seconds until Chuck decides that the kick's over, the lighting was good and the scene has been printed. While all this posing's going on, the bad guy walks right up and chops you a few times until you're dead. You can't touch him or he'll smack you, and yet pressing the fire button to put yourself into the pose does nothing to hurt the guy, no matter how good your timing is. Even if it did (Adam says you have to kick him in the head), it would be a dull, uneventful game with absolutely zero redeeming qualities. Admirable!

ZAXXON (1982, Coleco) Oops. I'm sorry. The actual title as it appears on the cartridge label is *The OFFICIAL Zaxxon*. Oh, really? Did anyone consult Sega

on this?

This coin-op translation is drastically wrong from the beginning, because you're not flying diagonally anymore. You're flying straight up. The space fortress is still scrolling underneath you, and your spaceship still has a shadow, but it looks about as 3-D as the print you're currently reading.

Okay. Fine. Let's see if it's a good game if the player pretends that it was never a completely different-looking coin-op.

Uh-oh! It's *still* a bad game!

The thing is, the people at Coleco, bless their little britches, still tried to program a game that involved altitude adjustment. You have to climb or dive in order to attain the level of the bad guys you want to shoot, and you have to get yourself over walls. But it's really hard to tell what altitude you're at during any given moment. The shadows certainly don't help, although I have the terrible feeling that they're supposed to.

Especially unpleasant to play, 2600 *Zaxxon* outlasts even the most popular role-playing games in longevity. At any time for the rest of your life, plugging in this cart will cause you to feel bad in many different ways. Not even Lord British can command that kind of staying power.

Even people who don't like to play *Zaxxon* will feel as if they're covered in sores and have suddenly wandered into an oasis of soothing lotion when they go from this game to any translation that comes even close to the coin-op original. It *is* like being on a plane, I admit; it's very realistic in that sense. Playing it long enough will make you nauseous.

The coin-op designer probably didn't complain because he died of a heart attack when he first saw this. Over-bad! Applause! -- CF

ODYSSEY²

The Machine and the Games

By Adam Trionfo

The Odyssey 2 is a large (13" deep by 13 1/2" wide), silver game console released by Magnavox in 1978. It is the only game console that has come standard with a keyboard (a membrane keyboard is actually part of the console itself). The Odyssey 2 was sold throughout the late seventies and early eighties in competition with the VCS and Intellivision.

The joystick feels rather large. Its base measures 4 1/2" by 3 1/2" and is 1 1/2" thick. Compare that to the standard Atari 2600 joystick, on which the base is 3 1/2" square and only a bit more than an inch thick. It might not sound like much, but it really does make a huge difference in game-play and comfort.

On most Odyssey 2s, the joysticks are permanently attached to the system. If a joystick broke, the whole unit had to be brought to an authorized service center or sent back to Magnavox for repair. That is worse than inconvenient; it is inexcusable. Later releases did have joysticks that could be unplugged, though I have never seen one of these units. The controller company Wico even made an adaptor for these later releases so that 2600-compatible joysticks could be used instead of the standard Odyssey fare.

"They're better than the 5200 or Intellivision controllers," says Chris about the standard Odyssey joysticks. Most gamers know that this isn't really much of a compliment. Basically, it means that they aren't completely unusable. Rating the Odyssey 2 controllers from one to ten, I

would give them an overall rating of seven, with a two for small children (since my son is only four, I always think of how an input device can be manipulated by small hands).

Most of the Odyssey 2 games are of rather poor quality, with even the supposedly great games being mediocre when compared to those on other systems of the same era. Despite the Amazing Wizard of Odyssey commercials, most games were *not* "amazing."

Included here are summaries of a few interesting cartridges for the Odyssey 2. Don't look at it as a list of the best games for the Odyssey 2, because it isn't. It is a list of some games that are fun to play, a non-game and a boring oddball with some neat features. These are some of the cartridges that I think every Odyssey owner should at least have a look at. I have not included any of the video/board games, i.e. *Quest For the Rings*, because I have never had the patience to set them up and try them out. I understand that they can be quite fun with enough players. If anyone would like to review them, let us know.

Computer Intro! -- This is probably the strangest cartridge for the Odyssey 2. It is an assembler. It includes a 103-page booklet that gives a brief history of computers and the uses that they have. Then it jumps right in and has the user entering machine language programs and learning assembly.

While I think the idea of this cartridge is great, it has a fatal flaw: There is no way to store anything that you program! I imagine that this cartridge was used by some people with real passion and enthusiasm. It probably even whetted the appetite of a few folks who went on to become programmers who would not have otherwise.

However, I can hardly imagine myself taking an hour to enter a program only to have it disappear when the console is turned off.

This program wasn't meant to be an assembler for professional use. If it had been, then you can bet that Magnavox would have called it *Assembler!* and not *Computer Intro!*. It just seems that the Odyssey 2 could have had a radical following of hackers and programmers had Magnavox had the insight to make a cassette jack on the cartridge for the input and output of programs. Maybe it isn't even possible. But it might have begun an underground movement similar to that of *BASIC* on the Bally Astrocade.

I recommend a glance at this cartridge, despite the fact that programs can't be saved. I have entered programs myself, and they work fine. But to have to shut the computer off and lose the work is a crime. If anyone is interested in actual programming on the Odyssey 2, this cartridge is a must-have because the booklet that comes with it is an absolute gem, containing information and charts about Odyssey 2 internals that you would be hard-pressed to find anywhere else. Besides, where else are you going to find an introduction to computers that presumes that the reader can learn Hex in a page or two and be programming in Assembly a few pages later?

K.C. Munchkin! -- Atari believed that this game was so similar to *Pac-Man* that they sued Magnavox. Atari won the suit and Magnavox was then unable to sell the game. Why, then, is this one of the most common games available for the system? Shouldn't only a limited number of these cartridges have been released? Can anyone help shed some light on this?

Atari was partly right; this game is *based* on *Pac-Man*. But

it isn't a clone. It introduces a few novel concepts not available in *Pac-Man*, such as different mazes and moving objects that are usually stationary.

K.C. is called a munchkin, the ghosts are named munchers and the dots are munchies. Unlike in *Pac-Man*, in which there is a maze that is completely filled with unmoving dots that must be eaten, *K.C.*'s maze has only eight munchies that float around the maze. Our hero munchkin must chase after these munchies while being pursued by munchers. Got that?

The mazes in this game are selected by pressing 0-3 for one of the four standard mazes; 4 creates a random maze, 5-8 gives you invisible walls and 9 offers a random maze with invisible walls. One of the selling points of this game was that the player could make an unlimited amount of his own mazes. This is true, but, of course, they cannot be saved. Newly designed mazes don't add much to game-play anyway. As an experiment, I designed a maze with no walls. The munchers and munchies still wandered around as if they were confined by the nonexistent walls.

This game, while similar to *Pac-Man*, is different enough to make Atari's legal suit seem to have been on shaky ground. I'm not sure why there are so many cartridges if Atari won the the suit, but I'm glad it is available; unlike *Pac-Man* for the VCS (the dud that Atari was making while in court), *K.C. Munchkin!* is a fine game that is worthy of play by any Odyssey 2 owner.

K.C.'s Krazy Chase! -- This is the sequel to *K.C. Munchkin*. The concept of this game is very similar to that of the original, but the visuals have been changed tremendously. I guess that was done to make sure Atari didn't

come and give Magnavox another happy visit.

The game still takes place in a maze, but the munchies are now trees (!) and the munchers have been replaced with a caterpillar called Dratapillar and two meanies called Drats. Trees grow at random locations in the maze, and K.C. must eat them while avoiding the Drats and the head of the Dratapillar. However, the body of the Dratapillar can be eaten, giving K.C. the power to stun the Drats.

This game is also one of the few that has been enhanced for use with the Odyssey 2's voice synthesizer. When the game begins, you are prodded to start moving about the maze with "Go!" Randomly, the game shouts "Hurry!" or "Watch out!" When K.C. runs into a Drat or the Dratapillar's head, the game lets the player know with a sad-sounding "Ouch! Oh no!"

K.C.'s Krazy Chase! also allows the player to create mazes, as well as using the standard mazes and random options. This game is similar to *K.C. Munchkin!* in much the same way that *Ms. Pac-Man* is similar to its own predecessor. They are basically the same game, but once you play the sequel, it becomes clear that the first was always missing a little something.

Killer Bees! -- This is an original, fast-paced game of simplicity with graphics that are well-drawn and sound effects that are great; it is a strong highlight of the Odyssey 2 library.

You control a swarm of bees that must protect the earth from alien invaders called Beebots. The idea sounds pretty bad, but the game-play is fantastic. You kill the Beebots by stinging them to death. As you pass over them, they slow down a bit; the longer the player stays over them, the slower they move. They

eventually turn into tombstones. Except for moving around rather quickly, the Beebots can't protect themselves. They rely on one to three swarms of other bees to kill you off in the same manner in which you sting the Beebots to death.

This game is also voice-enhanced. The bees make a digitized buzzing noise. The player's bees say "Oh!" when they die. Not much use. It looks like the idea was added afterwards. Maybe a top exec at Magnavox sees the game and likes it, but says, "Wouldn't it be way better if the bees really buzzed?"

The same feeling of helplessness that comes over me when I'm losing my cities in a hectic game of *Missile Command* is what occurs in the later levels of *Killer Bees!*. This game has some of the Odyssey's best animation as well as the only interesting title screen. It is obvious that attention to detail really went into this game. It shows through. This game is really great.

Smithereens! -- There is nothing fantastic about this game. It is included here because, if you have the voice synthesizer, this is the game to show it off with.

The game features the age-old theme of two castles catapulting boulders at each other. I like that theme, but here, it has been too simplified. No longer do you decide how much power to use, the angle of the shot or adjustment for wind, all of which are what have always made the other variations on the theme interesting. Now just hold the joystick in any direction; depending on how long it's held, that's how far the bullet/boulder goes. It seems neat -- for about two minutes.

This game makes great use of the Voice for sound effects. The bullet/boulder makes a great
(contd. on page 8)

Amok!

A New Game for the Odyssey 2

By Adam Trionfo

There is a new game that makes most of the other Odyssey 2 offerings seem pale by comparison. It isn't original, but it is fun and fast. It was written by John Dondzilla and it's called *Amok!*.

Anyone who has a Vectrex has probably heard of John, as he has made new games for that system as well. John also branched out and created two games for the ColecoVision (plus a demo). He has initiated continued programming interest in those two systems, and now it looks as though he may spur another look at the Odyssey 2 (which can only be a good thing).

Having never favored this system, I never would have expected to purchase a new game for it. But *Amok!* is a *Berzerk* clone; I have recently acquired a newfound interest in *Berzerk*, and coupled with the fact that John has made great Vectrex games, it prompted me to send my money off in a hurry.

First off, *Amok!* isn't an amazing technical achievement. It does not have amazing graphics or even animation. It doesn't use the Voice to create speech effects as one might expect a *Berzerk* clone to do (in fact on John's website he says that he decided not to use the Voice after finally reading its technical documentation). But it makes up for all of this with a surprising speed that compels the player to play over and over. Your small green character appears in a maze very similar to *Berzerk's*, but there are a few differences between the games.

In *Berzerk*, Evil Otto appears after you have been taking your time picking off robots. Once he appears, it means that the player had better leave the room rather quickly, because Otto is much faster than the player. But in *Amok!*, Smileybot (Otto's equivalent) appears onscreen

almost immediately after the player appears. Luckily, he moves slower than the player. Using precise joystick movement and observation skills, it is possible to premeditate Smileybot's actions, thus avoiding death. Also, Smileybot enters at one of only two locations.

From the *Computer Intro!* manual I have deduced that the machine's internal characters are used for much of this game (which makes it a bit too similar to such a crowning Odyssey 2 achievement as *Alien Invaders Plus!*). Enemy robots appear to be hex 32 and 35, with their explosion being 3A. On occasion, explosions seem to be random characters; I have seen robots die and become trees (\$37) or right arrows (\$36).

The characters' movement is smooth but uninspired. They all just seem to slide along; nothing is animated. This is the only aspect that I feel could have been improved upon. The player could have been given at least one extra frame.

Amok! contains twelve different rooms, with level ten being the highest we've reached (Chris reached, actually). The action gets faster and the exits become more difficult to get to. The level of difficulty proceeds with a slow, natural pace. With enough practice, I'm sure I could even make it to level twelve myself. If anyone has gotten that far, let us know.

Amok! does have its problems. Collision detection is strange; the player and bullets are allowed to touch the bottom halves of the robots. While none of my shots have passed through an enemy harmlessly from the hip up, they never affect the legs. The robots' shots, which are about three times as large as the player's, also pass through the bottom part of the player. This is all obviously intentional; I just wonder why.

Oddly, the robots' bullets can kill the player before he is actually hit by them. It doesn't really distract from game-play, as it is predictable

and seems to affect all parts of the game. Smileybot doesn't actually have to touch the player either; a close call is often enough.

All of this probably sounds worse than it really is. What appears to happen is that the player's next position is calculated, a collision is checked-for and *then* the player is moved. This means that he would have been hit anyway, but it looks like Smileybot or a bullet has just missed him. Once this quirk is understood, the game is unaffected.

If *Amok!* had been released in 1981 or '82, it would have sold very well -- not because Odyssey 2 owners were starving for new games (which they were), but because it has solid game-play value. Of course, if Atari thought that *K.C. Munchkin!* looked like *Pac-Man*, then Stern would have undoubtedly mentioned to John that *Amok!* was just a bit too similar to *Berzerk*. He would have had to change it (and that doesn't just mean putting sunglasses on the robots) to release it. I'm looking forward to seeing another fast-action game like this for the Odyssey 2. Keep up the good work, John! -- AT

("Odyssey 2," contd. from page 7)

digitized explosion sound when it hits the castle. More speech is in this game than in any other Odyssey 2 game I have heard. The speech is all made by an antagonistic-sounding voice that says stuff like: "Come on, Turkey! Attack," "You blew it," "Mercy! Mercy," "Ouch! Help," "Hit it," "Amazing!" and "That's Easy." That isn't the limit of the speech, either. You need to hear it!

It may not be fun to play, but it is fun to listen to -- once or twice, anyway. If you have small kids, they will love it. My son laughs the whole time he plays it. He thinks it is hilarious. I think that it is at least funny. If you have The Voice, get this cartridge. -- AT

Have We Reached Maximum Innovation?

by Chris Federico

When I was in Kindergarten, living in Cleveland, I remember a yellow game console that sat in our living room and got plugged in on special occasions. It played *Pong*, but my folks referred to it as *Hockey*, so maybe that's what the clone was actually called. Anyway, I thought it was really cool that you could control something on TV, let alone play a game against someone. It was an EVENT when it got hooked up to our television set, because it was way neater than any of the toys I had. It was definitely more interesting than a Pinball machine. We kept the unit when we moved to Milwaukee, but I don't remember seeing it after that.

In 1980, when I was 9 and we'd recently moved to Albuquerque, my dad dragged my brother and I along to his gym to wait in the lobby while he worked out. Looking forward to a boring afternoon with nothing to do, Mike and I brought along a matchbox car and a book (respectively). Arriving, we saw a strange coffee table between the reception couches, and ambled over to investigate as dad went off to torture himself by deliberately lifting heavy things over and over.

It was a table-top model of the *Asteroids Deluxe* coin-op -- my first encounter with a non-*Pong* video game. The lines and square ball had evolved into the shapes of boulders and an actual spaceship, and I thought it was the coolest thing in the world. You could *shoot* at stuff, and you had three chances to keep from being smashed or shot. It was a *scenario*, not an ultra-simple

tennis court affair. I remember how it became a whole new game once I discovered the "thrust" button. New elements like that never arose in *Pong*. A further step beyond the role-playing sophistication of *Asteroids Deluxe* didn't occur to me, because I had nothing to compare it to except *Pong*. It was the height of consumer-ready technology.

I ran after dad and asked him for some quarters. He gave me the ones he had, but my brother and I quickly used them up. We could then only look at the game's teaser mode. I became so desperate to be in the little spaceship again that I worked up the nerve to approach one of the gym's members, a complete stranger who was standing in the lobby, and ask him if I could borrow a quarter. It was crucial that I further challenge this cool new machine. The prospect of leaving the gym without playing any more was tantamount to the end of the world. The stranger came over following my solicitation and looked at the game.

"Yeah, you better show me how to play," he said, and got us a couple dollars' worth of quarters. (Remember when strangers did cool things like that sometimes?) My dad came out to check on us and saw us still playing the game. The stranger told him, "They're showing me how to play." My dad thanked the guy, a little embarrassed, and returned to his workout.

One night later in the year, he had an argument with my mom and decided to bring me to the bar with him. He seldom drank, but when we got there I beheld the actual object of his patronage: *Pac-Man*. He showed me how to play and I was fascinated. This was surely the most incredible progression from the single-color *Asteroids* screen that was possible. I didn't even

know that these things were called "video games"; there were just *Asteroids* machines, and now, *Pac-Man* machines. I played a couple of games, and the wild colors and multi-character action -- something that wasn't taken for granted yet -- blew my mind so thoroughly that I could clear little more than one corridor's worth of dots. "It takes practice," my dad said in that typical state-the-obvious mode of fathering.

Our first VCS was brought home in 1981, along with *Space Invaders* and (of course) *Combat*. I couldn't play the thing enough. That's all I did; all I thought about was getting more games. I invented new ones that I fantasized about programming someday. I envied people who had games that I didn't. They were *all* exciting to me. What an improvement on the so-called *Hockey* machine we'd once had!

I first saw a *Defender* stand-up in a gas station. I didn't play it, because whatever grownup was driving didn't have time to wait around, but I thought it was neat how the game's characters were introduced *Pac-Man*-style during the teaser mode despite being aliens and spaceships instead of cutesy ghosts. I first played it in a Safeway grocery store; I dropped in the lone quarter my mom gave me, blew away a few enemies, and got the dreaded GAME OVER message the second I finally figured out the controls. This was a new peak of involvement.

Left without anything else to do, I watched the demo until I finally realized that you were supposed to shoot Landers and rescue the Humanoids that they kidnapped, returning them safely to the ground. What a cool idea! Manic to play the game now that I knew what was going on, I begged my mother for another quarter, but she didn't have any more and didn't feel like getting

change.

My first *Tempest* was at the local Husky truck stop/diner. *Donkey Kong* and *Centipede* were both first spotted at a local Smith's grocery store, and I finally played the former at a Howard Johnson's restaurant. *Red Baron* and *Missile Command* were first indulged-in during a fourth-grade field trip to Chuck E. Cheese. Technology had been maximized; these detailed, often wonderfully frightening but usually cartoony games with their demanding quests or goals, fantastic graphics and sounds and eventually-absorbed control methods were the height of entertainment, as far as I was concerned, and I didn't see them topped for a couple years.

But then the *Star Wars* coin-op came out, and then shortly after that, realistic flight simulators took over 8-bit software sales. Surely a new height. I played games on my Commodore 64 that blew away everything that had previously been seen on the little TV in my room. Later, the Amiga version of Firebird's *Elite* was the most exciting first-person plateau I could conceive of. Throughout, people in the industry made accurate predictions about the future of gaming: Games would be so realistic that they would be like interactive movies, and scenarios would get more complex, the player's involvement more all-encompassing. Since that had already happened a few times, as I've just reminisced, this wasn't difficult to forecast.

But what predictions do we hear today? I mean, skip ahead to nowadays, with vast and super-involving role-playing games on PCs, first-person exploration epics (*Doom*) and the "sort-of first-person" action games on the PlayStation and Nintendo 64 (*Tomb Raider*, *Zelda 64*). These

are basically the heights of technological entertainment that one can buy in a department store, and they're also the main game forms the industry's settled on. But think about it: What's beyond that?

Sure, graphics will get a lot better, with digitized real images becoming more prominent until, I imagine, that's all we'll see. Microprocessors will get faster until speed isn't an issue. But what about the actual complexity and player involvement of the games? The graphic capabilities and chip speeds that designers now have at their disposal have finally allowed them to realize the most extreme game ideas. Plot concepts, the player's ability to revolve an imaginary world around him and the rules themselves have reached what is possibly the highest height in gaming innovation. Because, while future games will be more *technically* superior, how can the actual storylines, game-play methods and player involvement that we're now seeing be surpassed?

Good as *Pac-Man* and *Star Wars* were at the time, it was easy to think about what could be added to make them more realistic or require the player to do more things and feel more engaged by the landscapes and characters. But try to think beyond the playing scheme of *Mario 64*. I mean, what do you have beyond that? The scenario, even solely on its level of action, could hardly be widened.

Of course, this doesn't bother those of us who have at least as much fun going a few rounds with our ColecoVisions as playing any new game. But it's something to think about -- because a new type of video game would be very impressive back in the '80s and early '90s, simply because, like me with that first *Asteroids* coin-op, there was

no precedent against which to measure it. But what new types of games do we have left?

Invent the video game of the future. If you feel like writing about it, send it along, because I'd be extremely interested in seeing what vistas the industry has left to explore -- if any. -- CF

FLATULENCE NOTICE

Sure, if you read our articles, you know that we try to take a serious, intelligent approach to video games and even try to articulate our love for the hobby and where it comes from. But we also like incorporating a sense of humor -- do our readers?

We think so! But last issue, we posted a blurb about a new contest we were having, spawned by a reader letter mentioning the fart-like sound of a strike in the Fairchild *Bowling* game. We asked that readers send in any **farting moments** they could remember in the extensive library of classic video or computer games. You know how many responses we've gotten so far? One!

Come on, professional gaming cohorts! E-mail or send us brief descriptions of any farting sounds you'd like to enlighten us on. We're hoping to include a whole article based on them in issue #8. Help us celebrate the first-year anniversary of Adam & I publishing this newsletter together by enjoying the humorous potential inherent in our hobby! Thanks! -- CF

Have You Played Archaeologist Today?

Exploring Atari's Multi-Screen Adventure Games

by Chris Federico

While it's inarguable that the average 2600 game from any one of the major third-party companies (namely Activision, Imagic and Parker Bros.) contains superior quality to the typical title released by Atari themselves, I find the outright dismissing of Atari's own games as compared to others' to be awfully generalized and off-base. This is partly because my favorite type of video game is the multi-screen adventure; but even excepting those kinds of games, Atari has created some fantastic action bouts that easily rival any third-party contest. *Yars' Revenge*, *Krull* and the *Joust* adaptation are examples of earlier masterpieces, while *Gravitar*, *Solaris* and the translated *Jr. Pac-Man* are gems from the later era in which Atari, to a sadly diminished audience, outdid themselves.

But Atari's creative pool boasted one handful of games that, in my opinion, was the cream of the crop from the very beginning of the first gaming boom and continues to outlast similar workouts by other companies. This article will discuss Atari's adventure games for their own machine -- my favorites out of all VCS titles. I'm doing this partly because I don't agree with the bashing that's constantly discharged upon some of these games.

First, we should establish what "multi-screen" means. *Donkey Kong* and *Tutankham* are two quests that could be considered multi-screen, but not by my definition. The former engagement basically features

only one screen that is renovated with a new layout after the conquering of each previous one, and the latter harbors a playing area larger than one screen's worth of space but which scrolls like a moving window to fit everything in. The sort of game I'm talking about contains a variety of stationary, screen-sized rooms that are entered and exited via passages or doorways on the screen borders.

The object of such a game usually involves exploration -- finding certain objects and doing required things with them. These games are usually completed, rather than continuous. Regardless, some of them keep score by some means.

The first such game ever released was *Superman*, in 1979 (although programmer John Dunn used the screen-switching engine from Warren Robinett's yet-to-be-released *Adventure*). Considering Atari's other offerings of the day, this was quite a complex game with over-average graphics. As *Superman*, the player flies from screen to screen (city block to city block), hunting for arch-villain Lex Luthor and his five toadies. When the Man of Steel flies into one of these bad guys, thereby picking him up, he has to fly to the jail screen and deposit him behind bars.

Simultaneously, the player searches for the three scattered pieces of the bridge blown up by the baddies at the game's beginning. Unlike the wandering rogues, these pieces are always on the same screens. The only change I would wish on this game is a random scattering; but it doesn't take away from the pleasure to know where they are. It's fun flying quickly to their locations (some of us have had the city's weird layout memorized for years) and making blinding haste to the bridge

screen to see the magical reconstruction take place. In fact, the coordinative pleasure centers of the brain that VCS games often trigger (*Dodge 'Em*, *Astroblast*, *Solar Fox*), that primal release felt by controlling something simply, quickly and smoothly, applies manifold to *Superman*. It feels good to smash our hero through screen border after border as the loud rush of wind echoes over and over.

A neat thing is that the bad guys all have different speeds; the fastest is really a bitch to catch, even if you've found him. Sexy Lexy, of course, is the most devious, zipping from city block to block with his little backpack-helicopter. But what's really well-done, especially considering how early the game was created, is the random temperament of the bad guys. I've been playing this game for years; I still can't second-guess where they'll all be hiding. There's a set amount of collective movement patterns, I'd imagine; for example, almost half the time, Lex and a couple of specific criminals always start out in the screen to the right of the jail. But they all scatter so quickly and disparately that even knowing the game like the back of your hand won't necessarily guide you directly to each guy.

Hindering *Superman* are floating Kryptonite satellites with no less impressive movement patterns than those of the bad guys. The other nuisance is a helicopter that flies around at random, picking up and relocating the bridge pieces. It also picks up Kryptonite satellites and Lois Lane (the antedote for a touch from the former), but this isn't as bothersome.

Once the bridge is rebuilt and all six bad boys are behind bars, *Superman* has to return to the phonebooth on the game's starting screen, change back into Clark Kent, walk over the newly rebuilt bridge one screen to the

right, and make his way to the Daily Planet. Three tones signal the end of the game, prompting you to hit reset and try to beat your last time (my record's 1:17 -- without the cheat I explained two issues ago). It's almost impossible to play this game just once per sitting.

Adventure came out in 1980 and, more than the much more hectic *Superman*, forever changed the way designers approached action/adventure games. Like its antecedent, it has a plot that must be resolved. But it has no scoring whatsoever, it leaves more time for contemplation and, also unlike *Superman*, it employs a wholly logical room layout. This game fascinated me when I got it in 1982 and continues to captivate me; it feels mysterious and too quiet, and the quest feels momentous. The simple graphics add to the game's raw fixation on the completion of a straightforward act by way of unraveling a puzzle based on the manipulation of objects. A stolen chalice has to be found in one of two evil castles and returned to the hero's castle. Along the way you have to find keys to the castles, and you might have to find and use the magnet to pull one of them out of a wall, for instance, or the portable bridge to search the closed-off part of the maze inside the White Castle. Finding the sword and killing the three variously-tempered dragons makes the search easier. A bat -- the equivalent to *Superman's* helicopter -- flies from screen to screen, displacing objects. But unlike the helicopter, he can't be stolen-from; you have to try and persuade him to trade what he's carrying for something you don't need at the moment.

An altogether unique thing about *Adventure* is that the player can reincarnate his onscreen counterpart if he's swallowed by

a dragon. Being eaten doesn't end the game or decrement a depot of lives; it just limits the player's movement to the small space inside the beast's stomach!

Game variation 3 places the objects and characters in random spots, so this is the only one I play, because it makes this a game, plot conflicts and all, instead of a linear hike to memorized item locations. There is actually a set number of object deployment configurations, but there are so many that the game is constantly new.

1981's *Haunted House* has the player searching for three pieces of a vase that, rebuilt, must be carried out the front door. There are four floors, designated by the color of the walls, but this is all that changes upon entry and exiting via staircases; the floors themselves scroll up and down as the player moves, albeit being made up of mini-rooms separated by doorways that can't all be entered and exited at will. There are ghosts, spiders and bats wandering around that are all deadly to the touch, but in some variations the bat steals and re-deploys any vase pieces that the player's carrying. By way of aid, there's a key that allows passage through all locked doorways and a sceptre that renders the hero immune to baddies; but no two objects, including the collective vase, can be carried at once.

The game's not as complex or consistently bewitching as *Adventure*, but it's still extremely engrossing and satisfying to play. Its unique aspects are the fact that the player needs matches to see and pick up objects (in all but the easiest variation), which are blown out when creepies approach; and the representation of the hero, which is a pair of eyes that looks in whatever direction the joystick's being pushed (even when a game's not in play!).

Howard Scott Warshaw's *Raiders of the Lost Ark* entrances me almost as much as *Adventure*. This 1982 achievement returns to the room-by-room ways of that de facto prequel, but is minimally random; in compensation it involves a ton more objects (it introduced action/adventure gaming's first dynamic inventory) and some careful, proficient joystick work. It's spooky, larger than life and, for me, continuously indulging and pleasing to play. Even the rooms act strange and ominous. Indiana Jones searches for the Ark of the Covenant, the ultimate archaeological treasure; but first he has to slink around doing the right things with the right objects to figure out which desert mesa it's buried in.

When *E.T.* came out in time for Christmas 1982, it evidently disappointed a lot of players -- but not me. Not only was I relieved that it wasn't cutesy like the movie (in fact it's one of the most alien-looking games on the 2600), but I also became captivated for apparently the exact reason it didn't sell well: It's complex and takes a lot of practice to master. So sue me.

Mr. Warshaw's onscreen rendering of the ugly outlander has to fall into wells, searching for the three pieces of his interplanetary telephone. The game is extremely original, using icons that appear as the ground is traversed to do the various necessary things.

The cherry on Atari's multilayered cake of adventure (that's probably the worst sentence I've ever written) is *Secret Quest*, released in 1989 by Atari founder and gaming pioneer Nolan Bushnell. The game and the story behind its creation will be covered in a full article next ish. Seeya then! -- CF



Cartridges are my favorite way to access 8-bit programs because there is no load-time. Stick the cartridge in the computer, throw the switch and like magic, the program is loaded. No fuss at all. Unlike NES cartridges, which seem to grow dirt on the contacts, I have never had to clean off an Atari 8-bit cartridge's contacts. Unfortunately, with the price of disks so far below the cost of cartridges, it has been a very long time since carts have been made for the 8-bit (excluding certain re-releases). This is a shame because cartridges are an ideal way to distribute software to those that value the increased speed that they offer and don't mind paying a bit more for the added production cost.

Now things have changed. Included in this issue are reviews of three new cartridges: *MYDOS 4.5*, *Ultra Translator* and *Solitaire*. I have used these three programs extensively and am therefore able to review them based on my joyful experiences with them. A fourth new cartridge, *SpartaDOS 3.3*, requires further use before a proper review can be made (look for it in the February issue).

It is so strange to see an Atari 8-Bit cartridge with a copyright notice of this year. But it is wonderful, and I hope it's a sign of further distribution of software in this form. All of these carts are available for twenty dollars each, plus shipping, from Video 61 (Video 61 & Atari Sales, 22735 Congo St. N.E., Stacey, MN 55079;

Phone - (651)462-2500).

MYDOS 4.5 -- The Atari disk drive is fast and versatile. It still holds up well, even after all these years. But speed is a factor that everyone considers, so giving the old 5 1/4" drive a little nudge isn't going to make anyone cringe. Loading DOS every time the computer is turned on, even before using a cartridge *BASIC*, doesn't take too long; but it does add an extra thirty seconds or so to the start-up time. I never thought there was an alternative, other than buying a hard drive. But now there is a far less expensive item: an Atari-compatible DOS on cartridge named *MYDOS*.

I have discussed *MYDOS* in these pages before: It is compatible with *AtariDOS* but adds features and benefits. It was released as shareware in 1988, and is probably the easiest yet most powerful DOS one can use. The disk version, available at any Atari FTP site on the Internet, is a must-have utility. But, like all disk-based programs, it takes time to load from the disk drive. Wouldn't it be nice to be able to have access to *MYDOS* without needing to load it? That is the idea behind this cartridge. The only difference between the cartridge and the disk versions is that the cart requires an XL/XE system. This is probably because the original 800 can't have the cartridge-slot cover removed while in operation.

The cartridge works in a manner that I have never seen before (except on two of the other new cartridges). Normally, on any cartridge-based system, the user inserts a cart, turns the machine on and uses the software that is on the cartridge ROM. The *MYDOS* cartridge works the same way, but has one added step: After the computer is turned on, the cartridge must be

removed -- with the computer left on. Only then does *MYDOS* load.

BASIC looks like a cartridge to the Atari, even on the XL/XE systems where it's built-in. If the *MYDOS* cartridge wasn't removed, then *BASIC* couldn't even be used. The cartridge has to work this way so that DOS is resident in the proper area of memory. It is a rather strange feeling to be prompted to remove the cartridge while the computer is on, but it does work. Most importantly of all, I have not found one program that fails to work because of this cartridge DOS. Never, in all the time I have used my Atari 8-bit, have I found an application or utility that has saved me so much time. Highly recommended!

Solitaire -- There was a time, before the release of *Windows '95*, when many people said that the only reason to run *Windows* was to play *Solitaire*. Admittedly, Microsoft's version of *Solitaire* that is included with *Windows* is highly playable. It appeals to the masses because just about everyone knows how to play. You might not know how to use *Windows*, but you can at least play games with it.

The Atari 8-bit has seen more than its fair share of *Solitaire* games. Many of them were available for the first time as type-in programs from such awesome magazines as *Antic*, *Analog* and *Compute!*. But I've never played even one game that was remotely comparable to *Windows Solitaire* -- until now.

All of the type-in and PD *Solitaire* games had some drawbacks that, to me, made the games far less fun to play than actually taking out a deck of cards and dealing them myself. There were quite a few versions that used the Graphics 8 screen to deal and display the cards. This

slowed the game down badly, as the player was forced to wait for screen-fills of the diamonds, hearts, clubs and spades. It was intolerable. Many programmers must have felt the same, because other versions used character graphics. This relieved the slowness, but the cards ended up with no detail. Given a choice, I would rather play that faster, less detailed version of *Solitaire*.

Now there is another option. ChildsPlay Software has written an alternative to both of the above situations. This fast *and* detailed version of *Solitaire* has been written using the Atari-specific language *Action*. Besides warranting the praise of being the best version of *Solitaire* on the Atari 8-bit, it goes to show what a good programmer can do with a whopping 13K of memory. The cartridge can be used on both the older 800 with 48K and the XL/XE systems.

There are a few options that make this game more enjoyable for those who know how to play *Solitaire* well. The player can choose to draw three cards or just one at a time. Drawing only one card makes the game too easy; I can beat it every time in this mode. Scoring is also available. I don't use it myself, but normal and Vegas-style scoring can be used if desired (the default is no scoring).

The cursor that selects the cards is controlled with a joystick. It works well; I have no complaints about play-control. I do have one suggestion, though: Since so much effort has gone into this fine creation, I would love to see an option for mouse control (ST or Amiga) or true Atari Trak-Ball control. This would set the game apart from all other 8-bit versions. If you have played *Missile Command* using the standard joystick and then tried the Atari ST mouse instead (it is a hidden feature; press

Control-T), you will understand the significant improvement this can make to *Solitaire*.

If you enjoy *Solitaire*, then I suggest you have a look at this game. There is no better version available for the Atari. But what really places it over the top is that it is available for play immediately -- no loading time. I applaud the release of this game on cartridge!

Ultra Translator -- The Atari XL/XE series of computers introduced enough differences into the OS that some of the older 400/800 programs no longer ran. Atari made available a disk version of a program that translated the new OS to the old one so that most games and applications would run. A similar program called *Ultra Translator* was available on disk as well, and has now been placed on cartridge. Either you need this program, and it becomes an invaluable piece of software for you, or it is never used.

I have used *Ultra Translator* myself to run two games that did not work on my 800XL otherwise: *Drelbs* and *Space Eggs*. But this cartridge isn't for everyone. If you use a disk translator extensively, then this will save you the trouble of loading it and then swapping disks. But if you only use a translator on occasion, then you probably don't need this cartridge.

However, if you don't already own a translator program, then this is your best bet to get older software going on your XL/XE. -- AT

Wanted For Trade **Atari XEP80**

I'm looking for an XEP80. It would be a big plus if *Atariwriter 80* were included. I'm rather doubtful about the quality of the product, so I would rather make a trade with someone who wants to part with one that they already have.

The Atari XEP80 is a small box that plugs into either joystick port, giving the Atari 8-bit access to an 80-column display when used with a quality monochrome monitor. It came out in the late eighties and was not highly regarded; it was seen as too little too late. The display is very blurry unless the XEP80 is used with a monochrome monitor. Apparently, even a quality color monitor will give poor results. What's worse is that the display is very slow. Nobody seemed pleased at the time. Only a few Atari 8-bit enthusiasts bought this device after its many poor reviews in the various magazines.

Over the years, people did work with the device. Bob Buff's terminal program *BobTerm* will use it, although it will start to drop characters after 2400 baud if the internal XEP80 device handler is used. I have read that replacing the handler with the *SpartaDOS* handler will allow up to 9600 baud.

It is terminal communications and, to a smaller extent, 80-column text editing that draws me to this device. While I already have an 80-column display using *Omnimon-80*, it is of rather poor quality, and there are only a very few programs that have been written for it (I have two). I'm hoping that the XEP80 will allow me to use *BobTerm* to its fullest extent.

The XEP80 might not be exactly what I'm looking for, but it does give an 80-column display, which, if readable, will be a great help to me and my terminal communication efforts. I have a large range of 8-bits as well as other computers and console items for trade. I'd love to have a reader work out a trade with me. What do you say? -- AT